Developing the Regulatory Universal Learning Activities in Teaching English in Primary School

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**Abstract**

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of regulatory universal learning activities (RULAs) in English language instruction at the primary school level. RULAs represent core learning strategies that help young learners manage, plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes. These strategies are increasingly recognized as essential for equipping students with skills for lifelong learning, autonomy, and cognitive flexibility. Drawing from educational psychology, constructivist learning theories, and real-life classroom implementation, the article examines the role of English as a foreign language (EFL) in fostering these skills. The study integrates theoretical exploration with empirical classroom data collected from Kazakhstani schools to identify best practices, typical challenges, and recommendations for successful integration of RULAs into foreign language pedagogy. The goal of this research is to support teachers and curriculum designers in creating a learning environment that not only improves language acquisition, but also promotes self-regulation, critical thinking, and student agency.

**Introduction**

In modern education, there is an increasing emphasis on the development of so-called ‘soft skills’ — competencies that extend beyond subject knowledge and include abilities such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and self-regulation. Among these, regulatory universal learning activities (RULAs) are particularly important in primary education. These activities include skills such as setting goals, making plans, monitoring progress, adjusting strategies, and reflecting on learning outcomes. Such skills are foundational for developing independent learners who are capable of lifelong learning and active participation in society.

Language learning, especially English as a foreign language (EFL), provides a unique context for embedding these regulatory actions. Unlike subjects that are often content-heavy, language classes are interactive, cyclical, and learner-centered. Through tasks like dialogues, storytelling, project work, and interactive games, young learners can naturally engage in activities that require self-monitoring and planning. In Kazakhstan, as in many other countries transitioning to competency-based education, the integration of RULAs into English lessons is both a challenge and a necessity.

This paper explores how RULAs can be integrated into the structure of English language teaching in primary schools. It draws upon key educational theories, official curriculum guidelines, and practical evidence from Kazakhstani classrooms. It aims to provide teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers with evidence-based strategies and reflections on how best to create a regulatory-rich learning environment for young learners.

**Methods**

This research employed a qualitative methodology, combining classroom observations, structured interviews with teachers, and document analysis of lesson plans and national education standards. The theoretical framework is grounded in the works of Vygotsky, Davydov, and modern constructivists who highlight the importance of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), mediation, and the role of language in learning.

The fieldwork was conducted over four months in three urban primary schools in Kazakhstan, involving twelve English teachers and over 150 students in grades 2 to 4. Lessons were observed using a checklist that included indicators for planning (e.g., goal-setting statements), monitoring (e.g., student use of checklists or trackers), and evaluation (e.g., reflective tasks and rubrics). Interviews explored teachers’ understanding of RULAs, their strategies for fostering these skills, and the perceived challenges in integrating RULAs systematically.

Lesson plans were also analyzed to identify embedded regulatory tasks. Coding of teacher interviews was performed thematically to find patterns across responses. The resulting data provided a multi-dimensional view of how RULAs manifest in the classroom and how they can be enhanced through pedagogy and curriculum support.

**Results**

The study’s findings confirm that English lessons offer ample opportunities for developing RULAs, provided they are purposefully embedded into the lesson structure. For instance, in one school, a teacher used a 'learning contract' at the start of each unit where students would set personal goals, such as ‘I will learn five new words about food’. At the end of the week, students revisited their contracts to reflect on whether they met their goals and why.

Another common method involved visual planning tools such as story maps or sequencing cards. These not only improved comprehension but also enhanced students’ planning and logical reasoning. Activities that included peer feedback and collaborative group work helped students practice monitoring and regulating behavior in real-time. Teachers reported that students gradually became more autonomous and engaged.

However, the study also identified several challenges. Most teachers lacked formal training on how to cultivate RULAs, and existing curriculum materials often did not include explicit regulatory tasks. Time constraints also discouraged the use of extended reflection tasks. Despite these barriers, teachers who experimented with RULA-based activities reported strong improvements in student motivation and academic confidence.

**Discussion**

The integration of RULAs into English language teaching is consistent with broader educational reforms aimed at preparing students for the demands of the 21st century. However, the development of regulatory skills should not be left to chance. It requires intentional design of lessons, teacher scaffolding, and a shift in classroom culture from teacher-led to student-centered learning.

To build regulatory capacity, lessons must include specific elements: clear learning objectives, student self-assessment tools, opportunities for reflection, and gradual release of responsibility. Teachers should model regulatory behavior, use think-aloud strategies, and provide feedback not just on task performance but on learning strategies.

Moreover, professional development programs should include practical training in cognitive strategy instruction, metacognition, and differentiation. Technology also presents opportunities — apps that include goal-tracking, digital portfolios, and interactive self-check tools can enhance learner regulation. Importantly, systemic support from school leadership, access to resources, and time allocation are necessary to sustain these innovations.

**Conclusion**

Regulatory universal learning activities are fundamental to the academic success and personal development of learners. When integrated into primary English language instruction, they serve the dual purpose of enhancing language skills and fostering independence, responsibility, and metacognitive awareness. This study has demonstrated that even young learners can engage with RULAs meaningfully when instruction is thoughtfully designed.

Moving forward, educational stakeholders must ensure that RULAs are embedded in curricula, teacher education, and classroom practice. By doing so, we not only teach children English — we teach them how to learn, think, reflect, and grow. This is the foundation of a truly modern, learner-centered education system.

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